



Introduction

Overview

Ever since a City was founded in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains on the banks of the French Broad River, Asheville has been praised as one of the best places to live in the South. Asheville's crisp mountain air was advertised during the 1800s as a cure for the ailments of the day, and Asheville is still rated as one of the healthiest places to live in the country. This year, the City was named as an "All American City" and one of the top places to retire in the country. Asheville's popularity stems from the combination of the natural amenities of a mountain place, the friendly atmosphere of a small town, and the cultural activities of a large city. Hundreds of thousands of tourists vacation in the area each year, and many visitors choose to make Asheville a permanent home, making the City a growing urban area.

Asheville's popularity can be enhanced through the development of greenways. Greenways are linear corridors of natural land that serve a variety of purposes, especially when trails are developed within these corridors. As alternative transportation routes,



tourist attractions, and natural resource corridors, greenways in Asheville could provide important connections: connections between workplaces and homes, shopping areas and neighborhoods, parks and schools, historic sites and hotels, rivers and ridgetops, and mountains and valley. If greenways are developed throughout Asheville, the area will continue to be recognized for its outstanding quality of life and public amenities, and continue to attract new businesses and residents.

Today, however, many of the features that attract new residents to Asheville may be threatened by growth and development. With a few exceptions, Asheville is not a friendly place for bicyclists or pedestrians, especially in more recently developed areas. Once it was easier and safer to travel on foot or by bicycle between neighborhoods and other destinations, such as local schools, parks, shops, restaurants and businesses. Today, these connections have been severed by the development of new highways which has resulted in unsafe intersections, sprawling land uses (which increase distances between destinations) and other automobile-oriented features. These features serve as physical and psychological barriers to bicycle and pedestrian travelers. Tourists also suffer from these barriers and are also forced to remain in their cars, instead of bicycling or walking around the City. Encouraging tourists to use bicycles or walk has been proven to generate more tourist revenue for local businesses. One example of an area which is clearly suffering from this phenomenon is historic Biltmore Village. To reach Biltmore Village by foot, any tourist visiting the Biltmore Estate must negotiate through strip commercial development, four lane roadways, and parking lots to reach the Village (an unattractive prospect even for a motorist) which was originally designed for bicycle and pedestrian traffic.

Not only have connections between many popular origins and destinations in Asheville been severed, but the community's physical connections to its rivers and mountains has also been degraded. Many residents are unaware of the existence of the City's major rivers, even though they may drive across them on a regular basis. Neglect of these waterways has led to decreased water quality and increased flooding in Asheville, due to encroachment by residences and businesses. The mountains surrounding the City offer residents and visitors excellent outdoor recreation opportunities, including trails along the Blue Ridge Parkway and within Pisgah National Forest. However, public open space within the City is limited.

Additionally, as is common in many other urban areas throughout the country, Asheville is beginning to experience other problems that often accompany growth, including increased traffic congestion, diminishing air and water quality, a loss of wildlife habitat and natural lands, and fewer close-to-home recreational opportunities.



The Master Plan

The Asheville Greenways Master Plan will address the transportation, environmental, health, recreation, economic and educational benefits offered by greenways, and will describe air quality and traffic congestion improvements that can result from increasing non-motorized trips. Providing local residents greater choice and more opportunities to bicycle and walk will serve to encourage a cleaner, greener, safer, and healthier community. This, in turn, will improve the quality of life throughout the City, maintaining the area as a desirable place to visit, live, and work. Greenways can help continue to make Asheville an attractive and sustainable community for economic development well into the 21st Century.

The planning process for the Master Plan consisted of seven primary tasks, as shown in the chart on the next page. A site evaluation of the City of Asheville and potential greenway corridors was undertaken first, along with the formation of an Asheville Greenways Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Committee members included more than thirty individuals representing landowners, businesses, City departments, other local agencies, non-profit organizations and interested citizens, who provided focused feedback and input throughout the planning process. The formation of a vision, goals and objectives took place next, crafted by comments received from the CAC and participants of two visioning workshops. Preliminary recommendations for greenways in Asheville were then developed and presented to members of the City Council, CAC and participants of two community workshops for review. Recommendations were revised and presented once again for review by the general public at two final public workshops, by the CAC and by City Council. The last step of the planning process was the presentation of the final plan to the City Council.

The Asheville Greenways Master Plan was completed by a Consultant Team of two nationally-recognized professional greenway planners, the Trust for Public Land and Greenways Incorporated. The Trust for Public Land is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to “conserve land for people to improve the quality of life in our communities and to protect our natural and historic resources for future generations.” Prior to the initiation of the Master Plan, TPL was already at work in Asheville, negotiating with landowners to secure land for the proposed Reed Creek Greenway. Greenways Incorporated is a multi-disciplinary environmental planning and design firm that specializes in providing consulting services to government agencies, for-profit corporations and non-profit organizations. Their chosen professional focus is in greenway planning, design, development and management and they have provided services to more than 100 communities in 25 states. Chuck Flink, the president of the firm, participated in charettes which resulted in the development of the Riverfront Plan and Riverfront Open Space Design Guidelines for the French Broad River prior to initiation of the Greenways Master Plan.

